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## THE LAYING-ON OF HANDS

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An important part of the sacraments of the church is the laying-on of the hands of the clergy. According to both eastern and western churches, baptism is not complete without it. It is essential in confirmation and also in ordination. According to Catholic belief, it confers both grace and character, and it is the method of impartation of the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup> New Testament authority is not lacking. Ananias, by the laying-on of his hands, restored sight to the stricken Saul and at the same time conferred the Spirit (Acts 9:17). In the case of the disciples at Samaria, the imposition of the hands of the apostles was directly followed by special manifestations of the Spirit's presence (8:17). The Johannine believers at Ephesus were rebaptized into the name of the Lord Jesus "and when Paul laid his hands upon them the Holy Spirit came upon them and they spoke with tongues and prophesied" (19:6). Peter indeed connects the gift of the Spirit with baptism, making no mention of the distinct rite of laying-on of hands (2:38). And since the Spirit is not bound it may come even before baptism (10:44-48). That the ordinary method of conferring special charismata was the laying-on of hands is, however, intimated in the epistles to Timothy, who is reminded of what he had received by the laying-on of hands either by the apostle or by the eldership (I Tim. 4:14; II Tim. 1:6). At the ordination of the Seven the apostles apparently satisfied themselves that the recipients of the rite were already men full of the Spirit (Acts 6:3-6), and when the church at Antioch set apart Paul and Barnabas for a special work by laying their hands upon them no new gift seems to have been imparted, for these men were already prophets and teachers (Acts 13:1-3).

<sup>1</sup> The practice of the churches is described in a number of passages of Duchesne, *Christian Worship* (1903). On Catholic theory see the article "Character" in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, III, 586 ff.

It is generally assumed that the rite in question was derived by the church directly from Judaism. More exactly it is held both that it continued Old Testament usage, and that its meaning is the same under the new covenant as under the old. Scholars who agree that it was derived from Judaism are not, however, at one in interpreting its meaning. Bousset, for example, says that ordination (in Judaism and therefore in early Christianity) was regarded as impartation of the Spirit, while Schürer, who agrees that the rite was derived from Jewish practice, remarks that it did not impart a charisma.<sup>1</sup> It may not be superfluous to examine the Old Testament evidence and determine if we can the meaning of the rite as it there appears. Only after such an inquiry shall we be able to define the influence which it had on the early church.

Transfer of power or of some personal quality by bodily contact so naturally suggests itself to man that we shall not be surprised to find this method in use among various peoples. Imposition of hands may be said to be almost universal as a means of healing the sick, of conveying a benediction, of consecration (both negatively by exorcism of evil influences, and positively by conferring sanctity), and of induction into office. The priest's extending of his hands over the congregation is a symbolic laying-on of hands. Somewhat different is the lifting of the hands to heaven in prayer, though the idea of impartation of grace is present here also. In this case the suppliant hopes to *receive* the divine grace and his hands are the means of communication, bringing him into touch with the divinity. Among the Hebrews we find the hands lifted both in supplication and in benediction (I Kings 8:22; Lev. 9:22). Personal contact by putting the hand under the thigh or by taking the hand of the other party is the method of making the oath binding (Gen. 24:2; 47:29; Ezek. 17:18). As the oath is a prayer, it is appropriate that the hand be lifted in taking it (Gen. 14:22). Even Yahweh himself is represented as taking it thus (Deut. 32:40). The power of an inspired man to bring a storm from heaven or to divide the sea before the fleeing Israelites is mediated by the uplifted hand (Exod. 9:22; 14:16).

<sup>1</sup> Bousset, *Religion des Judentums*<sup>2</sup>, p. 195, and Schürer, *Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes*<sup>3</sup>, II, 199.

The umpire in deciding a case unites the discordant suitors by laying his hand on both (Job 9:33).

By an intelligible anthropomorphism Yahweh accomplishes his designs by his hand. The hand of Yahweh comes upon Elijah and stimulates him for his extraordinary attention to Ahab (I Kings 18:46). Elisha's inspiration comes from the divine hand (II Kings 3:15), and in vision Jeremiah sees it put words into his mouth (Jer. 1:9). It is by the good hand of God upon him that Ezra has a prosperous journey (Ezra 8:31; cf. Neh. 2:18). The hand of Yahweh gave the people one mind to obey the exhortation of Hezekiah (II Chron. 30:12). It would be quite in accordance with Old Testament usage, therefore, if we found cases of healing in which the hand of Yahweh or of the prophet was laid upon the patient. The fact is, however, that we have no such instances in the record. The custom of Jesus and the apostles is well known. But the parallels are found outside Israel and not within it—so far as the evidence goes. For Greek antiquity we can cite Asklepios, who frequently heals by touch. Artemis passes her hand over the woman in travail and gives her easy delivery. Zeus cures Io's madness by a touch. What is here related of the gods is of course the transference to them of the method used by their priests. From Babylonian sources we might cite the case of Utnapishtim, who was made immortal by the hand of Ea laid upon his forehead. Similar rites prevailed in ancient India and Egypt and probably persist until the present time.<sup>1</sup> The same idea of transference of power, only in a maleficent sense, underlies the accounts of disease inflicted by the touch of a ghost.<sup>2</sup>

As already remarked, the Old Testament record gives us no clear instance of healing effected by the laying-on of hands. Naaman the Syrian indeed seems to have expected the prophet to use this method, and was offended by its omission: "I said [to myself]: He will come out to me and stand and call upon the name of his God and wave his hand . . . and take away the leprosy" (II Kings 5:11). One is tempted to think that Elisha purposely

<sup>1</sup> Numerous examples are cited by Weinreich, *Antike Heilungswunder*, and are rehearsed by Behm, *Die Handauflegung im Urchristentum* (1911).

<sup>2</sup> *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft*, VII, 104.

avoided doing what the Syrian diviners were accustomed to do in such cases. The transfer of power by bodily contact was indeed effected in Israel. In restoring the dead boy to life Elijah was not content simply to lay his hands upon him but brought his whole body into contact with him (I Kings 17:19-22), and that the ideas of the Israelites were not less materialistic than those of their neighbors is shown by the similar incident in the life of Elisha, where the prophet first sends his staff as a wonder-working instrument, and only when that proves to be of no avail follows the example of his master (II Kings 4:29-37). Something of the prophet's power inheres in his mantle, as we see from Elisha's use of it (II Kings 2:14), and similar power was attributed to the bones of Elisha after his death (13:21). The indestructibility of these ideas is seen in the whole history of hagiology both in Christian and in Mohammedan countries. Our point is that in none of these cases is emphasis laid upon a specific rite of laying-on of hands.

The solitary instance where the hand of the prophet is brought into play is that in which the dying Elisha places his hands on those of Joash when he shoots the arrow of Israel's deliverance (II Kings 13:16). This seems to be a clear case of symbolism; the king is to be encouraged by the assurance that he will receive more than human aid. But this single instance makes it more remarkable that there is no record of transmission of power by the hand in connection with the healing of disease. This is not because of the dearth of incident where such a rite would be in place. God heals Abimelech in answer to the prayer of Abraham (Gen. 20:17), heals Miriam at the intercession of Moses (Num. 12:13), and heals Hezekiah because of his own earnest entreaty (II Kings 20:5), but in neither case is there any allusion to the laying-on of hands as mediating the cure. This is the more remarkable because Isaiah evidently acts as a physician, to whom this would seem the natural method. In the elaborate discussion of leprosy in the Tora nothing is said about imposition of hands. The efficacy of the rite by which the leper was restored to the communion of Yahweh inheres wholly in the blood applied to the convalescent (Lev. 14:14 and 25).

The similarity of the treatment of the leper at his purification

and the consecration of the priest at his ordination has often been remarked, and we shall recur to it again. Just now it will be proper to notice the considerable number of passages in which the Law enjoins the laying-on of hands as part of the ritual. The specific command is that the offerer of a sacrifice shall bring the victim to the door of the sanctuary and lay his hands on its head. The verb used means rather more than simply to lay the hands on the head. It might be more properly translated *press* the hand, as though some force were put into the act. According to Rabbinic tradition nothing must intervene between the hand and the head, which shows that contact of the offerer and the animal was the important thing in the rite. It is enjoined for the burnt-offering, the peace-offering, and the sin-offering (Lev. 1:4; 3:2; 4:4) but not for the trespass-offering. Where the animal is brought on behalf of the community the act is appropriately performed by its representatives, the elders (Lev. 4:15). It is not required where the offering consists of doves. Further, in the ritual of the annual day of purification the high priest lays both hands on the head of the scapegoat and confesses the guilt of the Israelites, all their transgressions, all their sins, thus laying them on the head of the animal which is sent away to Azazel (Lev. 16:21 f.). Finally, in the anecdote of the blasphemer of the sacred Name, those who had direct knowledge of the offense are commanded to press their hands on the head of the criminal, after which the congregation is to stone him (Lev. 24:14). Following this precedent the elders who accuse Susannah lay their hands on her head when witnessing against her (Sus., v. 34).

The Law itself gives us no light on the meaning of this rite. The compilers were evidently interested in having the ritual exactly performed but did not seek for an underlying idea. No extrabiblical tradition on the subject can be relied upon, as is evident from the contradiction between Philo and the rabbis. Philo says:

The imposition of hands is a plain indication of innocence on the part of the offerer, and of a life free from reproach and in concord with the laws of nature, for the Law requires that the soul of the offerer be filled with piety by constant meditation on good and useful subjects, and also that the life be made

up of good and useful deeds, so that the offerer may say with a clear conscience: These hands have neither taken bribes nor shared in unlawful gain, nor have they been stained with innocent blood.<sup>1</sup>

If there be a Jewish tradition, it is the exact opposite of this, for it makes the offerer confess his sins over the head of the victim, not only the sin-offering but also the burnt-offering and trespass-offering. Later Jewish thinkers added that over the peace-offering a formula of thanksgiving was pronounced, but insist that the victim is made a ransom (*kappara*) for the sacrificer.<sup>2</sup>

Many modern expositors adopt this view, and follow the rabbis also in supposing that the victim is made in the strict sense a substitute for the offerer, suffering death in his stead. But others see that while this might be proper for the sin-offering it is inappropriate for the burnt-offering. Various symbolical meanings have therefore been read into the rite. Ewald thinks the *impositio* indicates the sacred moment when the offerer, about to begin the sacred ceremony, laid all the feelings which must flood his being onto the creature whose blood must now be shed for him and which must, as it were, appear for him before God. Both the antique sympathy for the sufferings of the beloved domesticated animal, and the idea of the sanctity of the blood co-operated in this custom.<sup>3</sup> Oehler says that the offerer thus delegates the animal as the medium and vehicle of atonement, thanks, or prayer. More definitely at the sin-offering the rite expresses the intention of the offerer to give the pure soul of the animal to cover his impure and sinful one.<sup>4</sup> Keil brings the laying-on of hands in sacrifice into the same class with the rite of ordination, in that it is the outward sign of the transfer and intention of the offerer to the animal which he makes his representative.<sup>5</sup> Various modifications or combinations of these theories need not detain us.<sup>6</sup> A recent author thinks the

<sup>1</sup> Philo Judaeus *De victimis* 203 f.

<sup>2</sup> The Babylonian Talmud (*Yoma*, 36a) directs that confession be made over the three kinds of sacrifices. The further development by Maimonides is given at length by Outram, *De sacrificiis*, pp. 156-60.

<sup>3</sup> Ewald, *Alttestümer*<sup>3</sup>, p. 58.

<sup>4</sup> *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, pp. 429 and 481.

<sup>5</sup> Keil, *Alttestamentliche Archäologie*<sup>2</sup>, p. 220.

<sup>6</sup> For example *PRE*<sup>3</sup>, VII, 388, and Duschak, *Der jüdische Kultus*, p. 19.

act simply designates the animal as the property of the offerer—which would seem to be evident without any such formal declaration.<sup>1</sup> Present-day opinion seems inclined to connect the rite with the Roman *Manumission*, in which the owner of the slave holds the slave's head or some part of his person while pronouncing the formula which sets him free.<sup>2</sup>

Of all these theories the only one that deserves serious consideration is the one which makes the *impositio* transfer guilt to the victim. The most obvious objection to it is that the text gives us no intimation that it was in the thought of the lawgiver. If confession of sin was a part of the rite, it ought to be specified in the statute. That it would have been so specified is made certain by the fact that in two cases it is distinctly enjoined. In the law for the trespass-offering we read that the offender in bringing his sacrifice shall confess his fault (Lev. 5:5). But the trespass-offering is the one out of all the sacrifices in which the hands are not laid upon the head of the victim. Again, where confession is combined with the *impositio* this is enjoined in so many words. This is in the ritual of the great day of purification where the high priest lays the guilt of the people on the head of the scapegoat and sends it away into the wilderness (Lev. 16:21 f.). It is clear that this injunction has influenced the view of all who hold the substitutionary theory of sacrifice from the day of the Talmud down to the present. But the analogy does not hold. A sharp line must be drawn between the scapegoat and the regular sacrifices. The scapegoat is not a sacrifice to Yahweh; the confession of sins over it makes it unfit for that purpose, and it is sent away to Azazel. It belongs in the same class with the heifer strangled in case of an undiscovered murder (Deut., chap. 21). No laying-on of hands is enjoined in this case, but the elders of the nearest town wash their hands over the victim and protest their innocence. It will be said that if they are innocent, they cannot transfer any guilt to the heifer. But the Hebrews thought more realistically than

<sup>1</sup> Matthes in *ZATW*, XXIII, 105. Cf. also Baehr, *Symbolik des Mosaischen Kultus*, II, 341.

<sup>2</sup> Baentsch on Exod. 29:10. The theory is at least as old as Menochius (commentary on Lev. 1:4).

we do; they argued that if there had been bloodshed the blood rested on someone. These elders were infected by the crime committed in their territory, and it was this infection which they washed off. But the transfer to the heifer made it unfit for sacrifice, and it was strangled at a place distant from the sanctuary.

An Egyptian parallel related by Herodotus is often adduced to favor the theory of transfer of guilt. He says that the Egyptians when they offer a sacrifice take the head of the victim and, heaping imprecations upon it, if there is a market in the place carry it there and sell it to the Greeks; but if there are no Greeks there, they throw it into the river.<sup>1</sup> The parallel may be urged so far as the scapegoat is concerned, but must not be used for the ordinary sacrifices. The same may be said of the case where the witnesses laid their hands on the head of the blasphemer, as already mentioned. Those who heard the offensive words were infected by the guilt, and they transferred this infection to the offender, who was then taken out of the camp, bearing the whole burden. If we bring the sacrifices into the same class with these objects of the rite we must allege as has recently been done that all the sin-offerings were offered to the demons instead of to Yahweh.<sup>2</sup> But such a theory is contradicted by the whole Law. The sacrifices are a sweet-smelling savor to Yahweh, which could not be the case were they laden with impurity. And the fact remains that the burnt-offerings and peace-offerings receive the *impositio* as well as the sin-offerings, and the utmost stretch of imagination cannot connect these with the demons. And if it be said that the pouring of the blood at the base of the altar is intended to give it to subterranean divinities, this ignores the fact that the blood of the sin-offerings is precisely the most potent means of purification, even for the inner sanctuary.

One or two minor considerations may be mentioned which seem to corroborate our negative line of reasoning. According to tradition women, blind persons, idiots, and children were not allowed to lay their hands on the head of a sacrificial animal. If the transfer of guilt or ritual impurity were intended, this rule would be unintel-

<sup>1</sup> Herodotus ii. 39. The Egyptian inscriptions seem to throw no light on this alleged custom (Wiedemann, *Herodots zweites Buch*, p. 186).

<sup>2</sup> Volz, *ZATW*, XXI, 98.

ligible, for all these classes were certain to contract impurity. And that the victim is not a substitute for the offerer is indicated by the case of the Levites. The Levites were brought to Yahweh as a substitute for the firstborn. The firstborn for whom they were substituted were (according to this hypothesis) the persons to lay their hands upon their heads. But in the actual oblation it is not the firstborn who lay their hands on them but the whole congregation. Doubtless the narrator regarded the Levites as a sacrifice, that is, as a gift to Yahweh, and he therefore followed the analogy of animal sacrifice in giving the account. But the idea of vicariousness did not come into his head.

Although the ordinary sacrifices cannot be explained by the analogy of the scapegoat, one thing is abundantly clear: the transfer of spiritual powers and qualities by contact was an idea familiar to the Hebrews. And among the powers or qualities which may be thus transmitted sanctity is one. The worshiper warns his unconsecrated fellow-man not to approach too near lest he consecrate him by touch (Isa. 65:5). The contact need not be with a person; a sacred substance is equally efficient. The blood of the victim cleanses the leper, consecrates the sanctuary and the priests. The ashes of the red heifer remove defilement. No different is the impartation of the spirit by anointing (I Sam. 16:13). We are tempted, therefore, to see in the rite of laying-on of hands a method of consecrating the victims—that is, of imparting the quality called sanctity. But we are again disappointed. If the rite consecrated the animal it ought surely to be performed by the priest. But the only case in which the priest lays his hand on the head of the victim is the one in which the priest appears not as the officiant but as the offerer. In the course of their ordination Aaron and his sons lay their hands on the head, first of the sin-offering, then of the burnt-offering, and finally of the ram of consecration. But when they do this they are not able to transmit sanctity because they are not fully consecrated until all these sacrifices have been performed. In fact, we are told in so many words that their consecration is effected by the anointing which comes at the very end of the ceremony (Lev. 8:30).

Since sanctity is transmitted by contact it is conceivable that

it passes from the victim to the worshiper. Before dismissing this idea as absurd it may be well to look at it more closely. Traces of it are found in other religions than that of Israel. One of the names for the sacrificial animal among the Greeks is *hosioter*, that is he who consecrates.<sup>1</sup> The more closely we inquire into the origin of sacrifice the more evident it becomes that the animal sacrificed was in some sense regarded as divine, and the sacrifice was made in order that the worshiper might partake of the divine life inhering in its flesh. Grotius was not far wrong, therefore, when he brought the *impositio* into parallel with the custom mentioned by Virgil and others, the custom of pouring a libation of wine between the horns of the animal. The Greeks also crowned the victim with a garland. Both libation and garland attest the sacred character of the victim. And the Hebrew regulation that only clean animals be offered goes back to the same root idea of the animal as something sacred. This is further attested by the use of the blood. Its cleansing power comes from the sacredness of the animal. It is rather remarkable that in the law of the sin-offering it is not provided that the blood be sprinkled on the offerer. Yet the offerer is the one who ought to be treated in this way. How shall he be cleansed? The only answer is that the Law was codified at a time when the blood was reserved for the divinity, and the efficacy of the sacrificial animal was transmitted to the offerer by simple contact. From this point of view it is possible to interpret the text: "He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt-offering, and it shall be accepted for him for his purification." The legislator means: It shall be accepted for his purification and the contact will be as effective for this purpose as if the blood were sprinkled upon him.

It is not at all certain that the priestly writer had a clear conception of the original meaning of this rite. He was interested in the correct performance of the ritual, rather than in its interpretation, and finding this act to be a part of the tradition, he put it in its place as something that must be done. It is even possible that it came to him as a part of the act of slaying the victim, and that it was in some sense symbolical of the act of slaying, even where

<sup>1</sup> Harrison, *Themis* (1912), pp. 155, 159.

that was not performed by the offerer. Josephus in relating the great sacrifice in the days of Hezekiah says that the king and the rulers laid their hands on the heads of the sacrifices, and left the priests to take the omens.<sup>1</sup> Josephus must have been familiar with temple usage, and while he may have chosen language that would be intelligible to his gentile readers he can hardly have misrepresented the ritual. The passage in Chronicles on which he relies says that the sin-offerings were brought to the king and the assembly and they laid their hands on them, and the priests killed them and made the sin-offering with their blood on the altar (II Chron. 29:23 f.). Undoubtedly the Law assumes that the offerer will himself in most cases slay the victim. But there must have been many cases in which the help of the priest or the temple servant would be welcome. The lawgiver means that if the offerer lays his hand on the head of the victim he has done enough to express his intention, and the rest may be left to the priest or Levite. Ezekiel apparently assumes that the Levites will do the slaying, and in the consecration of the priests, where as we have seen, they act as laymen, the victims are slain by Moses, who is for the time being the officiating priest.

The conclusion with regard to the laying-on of hands in sacrifice is that originally it was an act by which the offerer partook of the sanctity of the victim, but that in the view of the priestly writer it was simply the essential part of the act of slaying. In either signification it cannot have afforded a precedent for the New Testament rite. If the New Testament church looked for a precedent, they would naturally have examined the account of the consecration of priests, and it may not be out of place for us to examine this rite, of which we have a detailed account in the Book of Exodus, duplicated in Leviticus. Here we find that the technical term for ordination and installation of the priests is *fill the hand*. In the ceremony as described, we find that Aaron and his sons were first bathed, then clothed with the vestments of their office, then Aaron was anointed. For all three priests several sacrifices were performed, they laying their hands on the head of the victims as already remarked. One of these sacrifices was specifically the ram

<sup>1</sup> *Antiquities*, IX, xiii, 3.

of consecration, because of the use of its blood. This blood was applied to the right ear, right thumb, and right great toe of Aaron, then sprinkled on the altar, whence some of it was taken, mingled with oil, and sprinkled on the priests and upon their garments, which are thus made sacred. Only after all these acts have been accomplished is the oblation placed on the hands of the priest, who by waving it before Yahweh enters on his functions. The culmination is the eating of the sacred things, by which the newly ordained priest asserts his right to the emoluments of his office. The whole seven days' ceremony is called *filling the hand*.

Although it is not altogether clear why this phrase should be applied to the whole ceremony, we may distinguish three ideas which are expressed in the several acts here recounted. There is first the purification by washing, then the consecration by application of the blood and the oil—possibly the application of the blood was exorcistic, and the oil was more distinctly the means of imparting the sacred character. The analogy with the purification of the leper already noted would favor this hypothesis. Finally came the act of induction, by placing the oblation in the hand of the *ordinandus*. With reference to this last point it is doubtful whether the original rite filled the hand of the priest with the offerings, or with the implements of his service, or, finally, with the portions assigned him for his own support. As the earliest priest was the minister of the oracle, we may conjecture that the important act was the placing of the sacred lot in his hand. The account of Micah might be interpreted in favor of this view, for after saying that the man Micah had an ephod and teraphim the account adds immediately: "And he filled the hand of one of his sons and he became his priest" (Judges 17:5). Confirmation might also be found in the case of Jehu, who filled his hand with the bow when about to slay his king (II Kings 9:24).

Other passages are less clear. When Moses exhorts the Levites to fill their hand to Yahweh, the context indicates that this was done by arming themselves with their weapons.<sup>1</sup> All that we are concerned to note is that the phrase "fill the hand" has become equivalent to "ordain." Ezekiel even speaks of filling the hand

<sup>1</sup> Exod. 32:27-29. The text is not quite free from suspicion.

of the altar when he means its consecration (Ezek. 43:25 f.). One thing stands out quite clearly: the laying-on of hands was no part of the rite of consecration. The apostolic church therefore cannot have taken its rite of ordination from the Old Testament ritual. In later days we find evidence of influence exerted by the priestly rite, both in the unction given at confirmation and in the placing of the paten and chalice in the hands of the newly ordained presbyter. This would be (if our conjecture is valid) exactly the filling of the hand which forms the essence of the Old Testament rite.

The New Testament rite then cannot be brought into direct connection with the priestly ordination of the old covenant. And it is necessary to note that the priestly legislation makes no mention of the gift of the Spirit as the result or accompaniment of the ordination ceremony. One important passage, however, does bring the Spirit into connection with the laying-on of hands. Before examining it, it may be well to remind ourselves that the Spirit is not bound to any one physical act on the part of man. He comes unexpectedly on the heroes of Israel; he is induced by music (II Kings 3:15 f.); he comes upon Saul by a sort of contagion from the enthusiastic prophets; Elisha needs only to be present when his master is taken from him in order to receive the double portion that he craves (II Kings 2:9 f.). Not to multiply examples, we may notice the conspicuous case of the seventy elders who ostensibly furnish the precedent for a Jewish Sanhedrin. The Spirit comes upon these, even upon those who remain in the camp (Num. 11:16 f., 24-29). The assumption that Moses laid his hands upon these officers is wholly gratuitous, and even more sharply in conflict with the sources is the assertion that the transfer of the Spirit can take place only by the laying-on of hands.<sup>1</sup>

The one passage on which this assertion is based, and which has undoubtedly influenced both Jewish and Christian tradition, says in so many words that Joshua was full of the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him, and adds that the result was obedience to him on the part of the Israelites (Deut. 34:9). If the author means that this spirit was given as the result of the laying-on of hands, he contradicts the earlier passage which speaks

<sup>1</sup> *Jewish Encyclopedia*, IX, 428.

of the installation of Joshua. Here we read that Moses prayed that his successor might be appointed, and Yahweh said: "Take Joshua a man in whom is Spirit, and lay thy hand upon him and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation and command him before their eyes and put of thine honor upon him that all the congregation may obey" (Num. 27:15-23). Here it is declared that Joshua was already possessed of Spirit (the word has no article before it) and what is transferred is a portion of Moses' honor or majesty. Apparently the laying-on of hands is the method of inducting the leader into the position of authority, but no more than this is intended. The consequence is to show that the Deuteronomic author is inexact. Probably he did not mean to imply that the laying-on of hands actually conveyed the Spirit.

However this may be, the text influenced later Jewish thinking according to which induction to office was effected by imposition of hands. The Talmud states that when a vacancy occurred in the Sanhedrin one of the pupils who sat in the front row behind the regular members was called and admitted to membership by the laying-on of hands. The theory of the traditionists is that there had been a regular succession of such teachers and judges from the time of Moses down. The unhistorical character of this assertion needs no demonstration. In fact the Gemara seems to lay little stress on factual succession since it allows a rabbi to ordain his pupil simply by giving him the title of rabbi.<sup>1</sup> Further, there is here no question of conferring the Spirit. What is done is to admit the candidate to the order of judges competent to decide questions of casuistry and to pronounce sentence on offenders.

The Jewish rite therefore was not ancient, and was not regarded as of great importance. This is shown by the fact that it was soon given up. Some scholars think it was dropped because it had been adopted by the church, but it is difficult to suppose that the Jews would give up a rite which they traced to Moses, simply because it had been imitated by the Christians. The whole impression made by the tradition is that it has no vital knowledge of the facts. If one were to look for a genuine Old Testament precedent, it might

<sup>1</sup> *Sanhedrin*, 13b (Goldschmidt, *Der Babylonische Talmud*, VII, 44) and 37a (*ibid.*, p. 148).

be found in the act of Jacob with reference to the sons of Joseph. When the patriarch was near death he realized that these lads, born in Egypt and of an Egyptian mother, had as yet an imperfect title to be regarded as members of his family. He therefore sent for them and declared: "Thy two sons which were born to thee in the land of Egypt before I came to thee are mine; Ephraim and Manasseh are mine even as Reuben and Simeon" (Gen. 48:5; cf. vs. 16). Then, laying his hands on their heads and blessing them he said: "Let my name be named on them, and the names of Abraham and Isaac."

This account would give a valid precedent for the laying-on of hands as a rite of initiation into a community or into a close corporation like the Sanhedrin. But the fact that it is nowhere urged as a precedent makes us doubt whether in fact the Jewish usage was derived from the Jewish scriptures. The Sanhedrin was an institution of the Greek period; it seems to have been modeled after the councils of Greek cities, and it would not be surprising to find that the rite of admission followed gentile precedents. Among the Romans the augur in ordaining the *rex* laid his hand on the head of the candidate and prayed for a sign from Jupiter.<sup>1</sup> Among the rites of initiation into the mysteries it is probable that laying-on of hands found a place. It seems well established that in the Mithra liturgy, the god was supposed to lay his hand on the head of the disciple and give him the spirit.<sup>2</sup> And in this connection it may not be without significance that the laying-on of hands was practiced in the gentile church of Antioch.

It is proverbially difficult to prove a negative, but our inquiry authorizes the following:

The imposition of hands in baptism and confirmation is not derived from the Old Testament.

The laying-on of hands in the healing of disease, practiced by Jesus and the apostles, is without parallel in the Old Testament.

<sup>1</sup> Deubner, *Archiv für die Religionswissenschaft*, VIII, Beiheft, p. 71.

<sup>2</sup> Dieterich, *Eine Mithrasliturgie*, p. 119. Other evidence concerning the mysteries I have not found. Apuleius says that the priest laid his hand on him, but this was only to lead him to the temple (cited by De Jong, *Antike Mysterienwesen*, p. 49).

The laying-on of hands in ordaining to office has nothing corresponding to it in the ordination of the Hebrew priesthood.

The imposition of hands by the offerer in the sacrificial ritual cannot be brought into connection with the Christian rite, either of initiation or of ordination.

The single text which speaks of Moses conferring the Spirit on Joshua can hardly have given rise to the apostolic rite in all its varieties.

Consequently we are justified in supposing that in this, as in some other points of early Christian usage, the church has been influenced by gentile custom.